

Political History Collection
Interview H.0001.08 : Tape 8

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Location of Interview: Dharamsala, India
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Interviewed by: Paljor Tsarong
Name: Drakten [Tib. grags bstan]
Gender: Male
Age: 57
Date of Birth: 1935

Abstract

Drakten [Tib. grags bstan] was a monk official in the traditional Tibetan government who discusses in detail the political events that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. In this interview, he discusses the use of arms against the Chinese by Khambas and Tibetans in Lhasa in 1959. He talks about the distribution of weapons among the people and discusses the speech that Ta Lama made about fighting the Chinese. He then discusses the meeting in the Shöl Pargang, and the meeting called to subdue the Khambas and to calm the anger of the Chinese.

Tape 8

A: At that time, the Dalai Lama was still there. Magji Keltsüla's [Tib. skal thshul lags] tsidrun, Tsendrön Kelsang Ngawangla, though he was staying in the house of the Simgag Chantrengpa, was not of our eating commune [Tib. lto tshang]. He said, "What?! Are you guys still sleeping? Now aren't you going to get up? Come along now!" He had a monk's robe on and he put on his laymen clothes. We were wearing our robes and he said, "Now, how can you wear your robes? Haven't you brought your layman's clothes? Put them on now." There were some who did have theirs and others who did not. We didn't have any. He said, "Everybody is going to the Tseja and they are distributing the guns." So we went to the Tseja to get guns. Everybody had a pistol in their pouch, but not rifles. When we got to the Tseja, Kungö Chemmo was just ahead of us. Since the cannons were fired, all of a sudden he must have been startled since he had his monk boots [Tib. ras zom] on and didn't have time to put his monk's lower garment on top of his inner skirt, drangjun [Ch. zhan qun]. He had his shawl and was going to the Tseja. He told us, "You government officials don't have to request for arms at this moment. You sit down and make a list of all the arms since they are going to be distributed according to the various areas and the house managers, khangnyer, of the areas in Lhasa." So we made a list and number. And to each representative we distributed around 20-30 guns or whatever. While we were doing this at the Tseja, the place was just filled with people.

Then Kungö Ta Lama came. As he came from Trungja, near the Shabden Lhagang, the guns were being distributed, right? He came with a yellow satin dress, Dagotse [Ch. da gua zi]. With the help of the servants, he got up on a raised area. With two hands more or less folded he said to the representatives of the people, "You people have such determination. If there is anything called a good intention that is whiter than a conch shell [Tib. lhag bsam dung las dkar ba], this is it. When it comes to religion and politics, the bodily safety of the Dalai Lama, at such a dangerous time, for the people to volunteer with such determination is just astonishing. Such determination is something that is whiter than the snowcapped mountains. However, just now the arms are being distributed. Even though the arms are given, the way to use them is to use them when the order is given or a bugle is blown, and not to just shoot when you are unnecessarily provoked or if you see a Chinese [person]. Such actions will not at all be tolerated. Since the arms are being given to those who have no military training, this is the reason for such a statement. In Kyangthang Naga [Tib. rkyang thang na ga], so many Chinese are moving about and just thinking that you can reach them and start shooting, they will say that the Tibetans raised their hands first by being the first to fire. Don't forget! The Chinese are just as ready to pull the trigger and they have no difficulty regarding this. If, from all directions they begin firing, there will be clouds of dust so that you will have difficulty even seeing each other and all you will manage to do is to say, 'Now what, now what to do!?' That's all that will be left to say. And the Dalai Lama is still here, so how are you going to guarantee his safety? How are you going to challenge them? They are fully trained soldiers who have surrounded us and have all their arms and ammunition well ready. So we, the moment we get arms, we should not cause any commotion. As I have said, your intention and determination is whiter than the snowcapped mountains, but "thought [Tib. bsam pa]" and "action [Tib. sbyor ba]" must be in agreement, otherwise even if you have good intentions, you have created a blunder. So with both thumbs, I ask you the people to be most watchful, careful. The Dalai Lama's safety is in danger." Having said that he got down. Immediately, they started bickering and shouting, "Yes, these

guys are really something, they are still talking like that," and others began shouting, "Still talking like that," and they shouted at Ta Lama.

Kungö just left quietly. The time had already arrived for saying things against the government officials. But what he said was absolutely true and extremely useful to guide and advise them when the situation was grave. Later when they really started firing and the place was in a cloud of dust, one began to think, "Oh! People like Ta Lama, though they did not have the foresight to predict the future, it was as if they did, and having used their wisdom, it seems like they knew before it happened." So regarding what Ta Lama said, I myself began to regenerate faith in such a person. Anyway, what he said was useful and we did not raise our hands first or start antagonizing. That's how things took place at Shöl Pargang and how the Kagö military headquarters started.

Q: There was a tsondu hragdū. What was the talk in that meeting? Who spoke and what was said?

A: For the meeting in the Shöl Pargang, I was not there, so what was said I would not know. If Barshi Jedrungla was there, then he would be able to say. You know Ngawang Thöndrub. At that time he was a representative and so if you ask him, he knows. What happened at the Shabden Lhagang, he knows. Tsador Champa Tendarla [Tib. tsha rdor byans pa bstan dar] was there, but he has passed away already. So I don't think there is anybody else around. I wonder if Kungö Gelek Targyela [Tib. dge legs dar rgyas lags] was there or not. Earlier, in the Shöl Pargang, our late uncle was there. Anyway, the Dalai Lama's order had come saying that we should establish relations with them, like some sort of link, like approaching the fire even if it burns you [Tib. mes 'tsigs mer gtugs], otherwise before we were ready they might fire their cannons. If they did that, then we would be the losers. They fired on the 10th night, though it was decided that people were to be sent to the Chinese [to talk] on the 11th. But also from the Norbulinga side, they were also thinking of making preparations, but time had run out. The Chinese were prepared and they just had to pull [the trigger].

Q: At that time the people rose up. Didn't they care about the government officials and the Kashag?

A: By then the people had become very powerful.

Q: Did they sort of think that they could not trust the Kashag?

A: Yes. Now, there's another thing. I told you yesterday that there was a meeting called to alleviate the anger of the Chinese and to subdue the disturbance of the Khambas. The one presided over by Sawang Surkhang and in the Legjö office. There were 5 representatives from each rank, with a total of 82 people. The opening speech was by Sawang Surkhang. Among one of the 5 representatives, I was one, Kungö Getharla was one, there were 3 others but they were unable to come to this side [India]. We are the only ones in India. What Sawang Surkhang said was this. He said, "Ever since the start of the organization by the Khambas, Zhongyang has made battlements and made many preparations. And as for the government, from all aspects we are powerless. We have come to a situation where our power is not enough. Now the time has come for the people to think, and just one or two of us thinking cannot manage." This is what he said, and later when the people rose up at Norbulinga, and like a seed, it was sown in people's mind. Since there were so many meeting, the talk would immediately spread, right? That's what he said. That I clearly remember.

Q: What did others say? What was the meeting about?

A: The meeting was to calm the situation of the Chinese, to subdue the Khamba's disturbance. What the Chinese were saying was to go and talk with the Khambas and if they listened it was good. If they would not listen, then the government should send troops and get rid of them. If the government could not defeat them, then Zhongyang would send reinforcements. For this, Zhongyang would not hesitate. In a nutshell, this is what they said. From our perspective, we could not see using guns on ourselves. The reply we gave was this. We said, "At Drigutang, the Khambas have organized. They are not to fault since there was no alternative for them because of being unbearable [Tib. bzod ma bde]. Now, in addition to that, if we send our regiment, we have to send in quite a force that could suppress them. With just a few [soldiers], we would not be able to overcome them. Now if we sent in a fully armed strong force, then what are you going to do if they join them? If that happens, then don't you start blaming the local government." This talk put an end to the idea of sending soldiers. I spoke to Liushar and this is what he said regarding this reply that the Kashag gave.